BUDAPEST PROCESS

Thematic Working Group Meeting on Law Enforcement Cooperation

Mutual trust and shared responsibility as the future of law enforcement cooperation

Date

25-26 June 2026

Location

Antalya, Türkiye

Summary

The Budapest Process convened the **Thematic Working Group Meeting on Law Enforcement Cooperation (TWG-LE) in Antalya, Türkiye**. The meeting was **co-chaired by Bulgaria and Iraq and supported by ICMPD**, as the Budapest Process Secretariat. It gathered **71 participants from 25 countries, the European Union (EU), as well as several international organisations**. These include: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Poland, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, as well as representatives of the EU, including Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME), European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), Frontex, INTERPOL, Mixed Migration Centre, UNHCR; as well as representatives of ICMPD, including members of the Budapest Process Secretariat.

1. **Meeting background and objectives**: Building on the conclusions of the October 2025 meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria, and the guidance provided by the Co-Chairs, the meeting focused on the steps to be taken for the development of a Roadmap for the Budapest Process Thematic Working Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation around three main elements: information exchange, responsiveness to migration route(s)-based developments, and joint capacity building initiatives. The meeting aimed at pursuing the following objectives: 1) contribute to shaping the development of a Budapest Process Roadmap on Law Enforcement Cooperation, including its scope, key priorities, and areas of focus, as well as concrete actions, milestones, and possible mechanisms for follow-up; 2) Consider options for strengthening communication and information exchange, including through a possible joint communication platform among Budapest Process countries, and improve responsiveness to route(s)-based developments

through the exchange of operational experiences; 3) Identify priority areas for strengthened cooperation, including opportunities for joint activities, such as capacity building, to further support practical collaboration among law enforcement practitioners. The meeting also provided a platform to highlight the growing importance of the Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners (COLEP), established under the Budapest Process and entering a new phase of implementation.

2. The opening remarks highlighted the importance of continued commitment among Budapest Process partners to collaboratively address challenges of irregular migration along the routes. Opening remarks were delivered by representatives of Bulgaria and Iraq, as the Thematic Working Group Co-Chairs, Türkiye as Chair of the Dialogue, the European Commission (DG HOME), and ICMPD, as the Budapest Process Secretariat. Speakers highlighted the increasingly complex and interconnected nature of irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, underscoring the need for stronger operational cooperation, mutual trust and coordinated action among Budapest Process partners. Speakers also reaffirmed the Budapest Process as a trusted platform for regional dialogue and practical cooperation, supported by its operational arm, the Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners (COLEP), and emphasised the development of the Law Enforcement Cooperation Roadmap as a key step towards translating political commitments into concrete operational action. Such actions contribute to the implementation of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling in line with the Eastern Corridor Initiative.

3. **Panel 1: Responsiveness to routes-based developments.** The panel was composed of speakers from Bulgaria, INTERPOL, FRONTEX, UNHCR and the Mixed Migration Centre. The panel examined evolving trends in migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and irregular migration along the Silk Routes, highlighting the need for stronger whole-of-route approaches and enhanced law enforcement cooperation. Speakers discussed increasingly adaptive and technology-enabled criminal networks, shifting migration routes, fraudulent online recruitment practices and exploitation risks faced by migrants. The discussion highlighted the importance of intelligence sharing, joint risk analysis, cross-border cooperation and operational coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination. Participants also stressed the need to combine effective law enforcement responses with protection-oriented approaches, including victim identification and referral mechanisms. The panel welcomed initiatives such as COLEP as opportunities to strengthen practical cooperation, exchange of expertise and coordinated responses among law enforcement practitioners across the region.

4. **Panel 2: Law enforcement cooperation to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings – joint communication platforms.** The panel was composed of representatives from Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Austria. The discussion explored the role of joint communication platforms in strengthening law enforcement cooperation against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Speakers highlighted the importance of timely and

secure information exchange, supported by harmonised legal frameworks, common terminology, standardised risk analysis methodologies and effective data governance. Discussions underlined the need to address challenges related to differing national legislation, data protection requirements and uneven technical capacities, while ensuring the protection of sensitive personal data. Drawing on experiences from across the region, participants emphasised the value of joint training, regional partnerships and designated coordination mechanisms. A phased approach, including technical cooperation, pilot initiatives and the gradual development of secure information-sharing mechanisms, was identified as a practical pathway towards enhanced operational cooperation.

5. **Panel 3: Strengthening cooperation in law enforcement capacity building**. The panel was composed of representatives from Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Czech Republic, and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL). The panel discussed the importance of sustainable and coordinated approaches to strengthening law enforcement capacities to address migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and related challenges. Participants highlighted the need for long-term partnerships, institutionalised training systems and knowledge-sharing networks, including through Training of Trainers (ToT) programmes and communities of practice. The discussion emphasised the importance of integrating new expertise into national training structures while adapting curricula to evolving threats, including technology-enabled crime and document fraud. Speakers also highlighted the potential of innovative tools, such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence, to complement practical training and enhance operational skills. Strengthened cooperation between training institutions, regular exchange of expertise and improved assessment of training outcomes were identified as key elements for sustainable capacity building across the region.

6. **Breakout discussions to support the development of the Budapest Process Roadmap on Law Enforcement Cooperation**. Following the panel discussions, participants divided into three breakout groups to further explore the issues raised and exchange on concrete priorities, challenges and possible areas for action to inform the development of the Budapest Process Roadmap on Law Enforcement Cooperation. The breakout discussions provided an opportunity to identify practical needs and cooperation gaps.

    a. **Breakout session 1**: Participants highlighted persistent challenges, including fragmented information-sharing systems, limited real-time intelligence exchange, insufficient harmonisation of risk indicators, gaps in victim identification and referral mechanisms, and the growing use of digital tools and fraudulent online recruitment practices by criminal networks. Discussions underscored the need for stronger coordination among countries of origin, transit and destination, enhanced cybersecurity and monitoring capacities, and more effective operational cooperation through joint investigations, parallel investigations, communication mechanisms and focal point networks. Participants also stressed that future cooperation should be supported by appropriate data protection safeguards, protection-sensitive screening procedures and mechanisms that strengthen trust,

interoperability and practical collaboration among relevant authorities along the migration routes.

b. **Breakout session 2**: Participants reviewed existing cooperation channels, including bilateral arrangements, liaison officer networks, joint contact centres and international platforms, while noting that fragmentation and limited interoperability continue to hinder effective operational cooperation. Discussions highlighted practical obstacles such as staff rotation, difficulties in reaching the appropriate focal points and the lack of common standards for data classification and exchange. Participants stressed the value of mapping existing legal frameworks, data platforms and information-sharing arrangements to identify gaps and opportunities for stronger cooperation. The discussion also underlined the need for clearer governance arrangements, more structured focal point networks and pilot initiatives involving countries of origin, transit and destination to strengthen secure and practical cooperation.

c. **Breakout session 3**: Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening institutional cooperation among law enforcement training institutions to support sustainable capacity development. Discussions brought forward practical ideas, including the potential value of establishing a Budapest Process Common Network of Training Institutions as a platform to facilitate institutional links, exchange of expertise, good practice and training materials, joint training activities and knowledge-sharing among participating institutions. Participants also emphasised the importance of continuous professional development of trainers, including through trainer exchanges, peer learning and the sharing of good practices and lessons learnt, supported by digital and blended learning approaches and improved monitoring and evaluation of training outcomes.

7. The Thematic Working Group meeting concluded with a shared commitment to translate the discussions into a practical and forward-looking Budapest Process Roadmap on Law Enforcement Cooperation. Participants emphasised that the roadmap should build on existing mechanisms, strengthen synergies among partners and provide a framework for concrete actions, measurable milestones and continued cooperation. By bringing together countries of origin, transit and destination, as well as relevant international organisations and law enforcement actors, the Budapest Process was recognised as a trusted platform for dialogue and cooperation, through COLEP, for practitioners to respond collectively to evolving challenges along migration routes.

8. Key messages and main conclusions

The conclusions below capture the main messages and priorities emerging from the meeting:

General Orientation for the Roadmap

a) Participants agreed that the Roadmap should be practical, operational and protection-sensitive, identifying concrete priorities, milestones and follow-up mechanisms to

strengthen cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination. The Roadmap should build on the priorities of the 2024 Budapest Process Ministerial Declaration.

b) The Roadmap should build on existing cooperation mechanisms and established operational frameworks, including INTERPOL, Frontex and other relevant regional and international initiatives.

c) A shared and common understanding of risks, threats and operational needs was identified as an essential basis for effective cooperation and for developing common approaches along migration routes.

Operational Cooperation and Information Exchange

d) Strengthening secure, timely and actionable information exchange was identified as a central priority for the Roadmap, including through improved coordination of existing communication channels, clearer focal point structures and greater interoperability between systems.

e) Participants highlighted the need for common operational terminology and harmonised approaches to risk analysis, better use of available data and the gradual development of practical cooperation mechanisms, including pilot initiatives where appropriate.

Capacity Development

f) The Roadmap should promote sustainable and institutionalised capacity development through stronger cooperation among training institutions and continuous professional development.

g) Training approaches should remain responsive to evolving smuggling and trafficking trends, including technology-enabled criminal activities, should expand the use of innovative technologies, including Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence, and should be supported by improved monitoring and evaluation of training outcomes.

Protection and Safeguards

h) Participants underlined that operational cooperation should be accompanied by appropriate data protection safeguards and protection-sensitive approaches, including effective mechanisms for identifying, referring and protecting victims of trafficking and other vulnerable persons.

COLEP and Implementation

i) Participants reaffirmed the potential of COLEP to support the implementation of the Roadmap by facilitating practical cooperation, operational exchanges, capacity-building activities and the sharing of expertise among Budapest Process partners.

j) The Budapest Process was reaffirmed as the trusted platform for translating dialogue into practical cooperation , with the Roadmap expected to provide a concrete basis for future joint activities, monitoring of progress and continued engagement among participating countries.

10. Recommendations and the way forward

Drawing on the discussions, the meeting highlighted practical directions to advance law enforcement cooperation under the Budapest Process, in line with Priority Goal 1 of the 2024 Ministerial Declaration and Call for Action on preventing irregular migration:

a) **Advance the development of the Roadmap** through further exchanges with the Thematic Working Group Co-chairs, Dialogue Co-Chairs, participating and observer states, international organisations and relevant practitioners, with a view to preparing a draft for discussion and endorsement within the Budapest Process framework.

b) **Further operationalise COLEP as a practical cooperation mechanism** supporting the implementation of the future Roadmap through practitioner exchanges, study visits, joint activities, capacity-building initiatives and the sharing of operational expertise among Budapest Process partners, including by facilitating links between relevant law enforcement practitioners and training institutions.

c) **Promote a common approach to responding to developments along migration routes,** strengthening cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination in addressing migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

d) **Build on existing cooperation mechanisms**, including through the use of COLEP as the operational arm of the Thematic Working Group, INTERPOL, Frontex, liaison officer networks, joint contact centres and relevant bilateral and regional arrangements.

e) **Strengthen practical information exchange** by improving coordination among existing communication channels, identifying dedicated focal points, enhancing interoperability between systems and exploring pilot initiatives for operational information-sharing between interested partner countries.

f) **Promote common approaches to risk analysis and operational cooperation,** including the use of shared methodologies, better use of available data and stronger cooperation on identifying evolving smuggling and trafficking trends along migration routes.

g) **Enhance sustainable capacity development through stronger institutional cooperation** among law enforcement training institutions, including through the development of a Budapest Common Network of Training Institutions to facilitate regular exchange of trainers and expertise, joint training activities, sharing of curricula, standard operating procedures and good practices, and peer-learning opportunities. Capacity-building initiatives should also make use of innovative approaches, including digital and blended learning tools, and support continuous adaptation of training methodologies to evolving operational needs.

h) **Ensure that operational cooperation is protection-sensitive** by integrating appropriate data protection safeguards and strengthening mechanisms for the identification, referral and protection of victims of trafficking and other vulnerable persons.

The meeting concluded with a shared understanding of the continued role of the Budapest Process as a recognised platform for supporting coordinated responses to evolving migration developments along the routes, bringing together key countries of origin, transit and destination through a trusted intergovernmental and interregional dialogue.